

For Immediate Release, Contact: Senator Margaret Rotundo (207) 784-3259 or Rep. John Patrick (207) 364-7666

Maine's Citizen Trade Policy Commission Seeks to Give Maine a Prominent Voice in the Negotiations of International Trade Agreements

AUGUSTA – The Citizen Trade Policy Commission announces that it will seek public input on international trade agreements at a public meeting on April 19, 2005 at the University of Southern Maine in the Luther Bonney Auditorium from 7-10 PM in Portland. “The Commission is in a unique position to take the concerns and ideas expressed by Maine’s citizens at these public hearings and when appropriate, seek legislative action or to go directly to the United State’s Trade Representative or Maine’s Congressional Delegation to ensure those concerns and ideas are taken into account when trade agreements are negotiated,” said Senator Margaret Rotundo. “Trade agreements have the potential to reach almost every aspect of how we govern at a local and federal level. Given the discussion in Congress about the privatization of social security, now is the time to discuss how trade agreements will impact a privatized social security system,” said Representative John Patrick.

At the public hearing, the Commission will ask attendees to speak out about their experiences, both positive and negative, regarding international trade agreements. In particular, the Commission hopes to receive comments on the Central America Free Trade Agreement (“CAFTA”) and the Andean and Panamanian agreements currently being considered or negotiated by United States with a number of Central American countries. “If we work in a constructive and cooperative manner, we can bring forth a cohesive message that will have an impact on the final language of these trade agreements. We can take that message and weigh into the negotiation process to ensure Maine benefits from these agreements,” Senator Rotundo stated. CAFTA may be voted on sometime this spring, and the Andean and Panamanian agreements are currently being negotiated.

“It is becoming clear to me that international trade agreements can be used to circumscribe a state’s ability to govern its own affairs. However, international trade agreements, when properly worded, offer the promise of expanded markets and substantial economic benefit for businesses and consumers alike. A balance needs to be reached and we strongly encourage the public to attend the Portland meeting because that input will help guide our work and help Maine become a more active player in upcoming international trade agreements.” said Representative Patrick. For directions to the University of Southern Maine visit the university’s website at

<http://www.usm.maine.edu/generalinfo.htm> to locate the Luther Bonney Auditorium on campus go to <http://www.usm.maine.edu/mapportland.html>.

The Citizens Trade Policy Commission was established by the Legislature in May of 2004 to assess and monitor the legal and economic impacts of trade agreements on state and local laws, working conditions and the business environment; to provide a mechanism for citizens and Legislators to voice their concerns and recommendations and to make policy recommendations designed to protect Maine's jobs, business environment and laws from any negative impact of trade agreements. The Commission consists of 17 voting members representing a broad spectrum of interested parties and 5 nonvoting members from five state governmental departments.